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First Report of the NOU Records Committee

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NOU Records Committee

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FIRST REPORT OF THE NOU RECORDS COMMITTEE

Introduction

Since this is the first report of the NOU Records Committee, perhaps a few words of background explanation are in order. I was named to establish a records committee at the annual meeting of the NOU in May 1985. At the fall field day in October 1985 I met with those people who had indicated a willingness to serve and was named chairman. I presented a draft set of by-laws, which we discussed, amended, and adopted. The committee membership and by-laws were approved by the NOU Board of Directors and ultimately published (*NBR* 54:72-74, 1986). Two of the main functions of the committee are: 1) to collect and evaluate reports containing documentary evidence of the occurrence of birds in the state, and 2) to provide guidance and assistance in identification and documentation. This report will enumerate actions by the committee on reports submitted to it, and through comments will attempt to point out the positive and negative aspects of documentation, remark on identification problems, distribution anomalies, etc.

This report covers most of the records #001 - #065. The first record was submitted in July, 1985, before the committee was even functioning, and the most recent record included was submitted in December 1986. Some of the records are still under consideration or reconsideration, some have been withdrawn, some were not complete enough to evaluate, etc.

In this report, the records are divided into two broad categories: accepted and non-accepted. Those records categorized in Classes I, II, or III are placed in the accepted group; those categorized as IV, V, or VI are placed in the non-accepted group. For an explanation of the classification system, see the committee by-laws (*NBR* 54:74, 1986). It is important to point out here that "non-acceptance" does NOT equate to "rejected". By definition records placed in Classes IV or V simply do not contain enough information to justify placing them in a higher category. Furthermore, only some of those placed in Class VI, the lowest category, are believed to be mis-identifications. These differences between "accepted", "non-accepted", and "rejected" may be subtle but they are important. The committee is rarely in a position to state decisively that an identification is in error. Usually the strongest statement possible is that the evidence available to the committee is not absolutely diagnostic for the stated species, and/or does not absolutely rule out other species. Lastly, if you submit reports, as I have, that are not accepted by the committee, don't be discouraged. In many cases, an observer is simply unable to note enough details. Even so, such reports may be valuable in pointing up future areas for field work and may help establish an overall pattern of occurrence that may not otherwise be apparent.

Acknowledgements

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The following is a list of committee members besides myself who have acted on some or all of the records in this report: Tanya Bray, R. G. Cortelyou, Ruth Green, Alice Kenitz, Thomas Labedz, Gary Lingle, and Babs Padelford. They are to be commended for their careful research, attention to details, insight, unbiased opinion, and for devoting the hours necessary to properly evaluate these records. Their prompt responses and conscientious work have been much appreciated.

Area of coverage

The committee is pleased to review reports of birds that occur within the present political boundaries of the State of Nebraska, with the eastern boundary as established by the Missouri River Compact, May 1943 (Nebr. State Statutes, Vol IIa, p. 663). Please note that due to channel changes the Missouri River does not presently comprise the entire eastern border of the state,

Format

The individual record accounts follow the nomenclature and sequence of the current *A.O.U. Checklist* and subsequent supplements (A.O.U 1983, 1985, 1987). There are two numbers assigned each record. An accession number (acc#), beginning with #001, is simply a catalog number assigned to records in the order received. The file number (file#), a species-specific number based on the A.O.U. number, is used to file and retrieve records and to track the reports by species. Thus, file# 2-1 is the first report of a Red-necked Grebe received by the committee, File# 2-10 would be the tenth report of a Red-necked Grebe received by the committee. When the committee has finished its deliberations the reports are placed in a file in the NOU library in the University of Nebraska State Museum, arranged by file number, and will be available to persons with a legitimate interest.

The following format will be used for species in the "accepted" category. The species name will be given first, followed by a brief statement about the occurrence. The location, date(s) of occurrence, acc#, file#, and the initials of the observer(s) who sent in documentation make up the rest of the minimum report. If the report and/or photo has been published, the reference is listed after the observer's initials. If an observer has submitted a photo or tape recording a (p) or (t) respectively follows his/her initials. A specimen is indicated by #, followed by the museum number and the name of the museum where it has been deposited. Reports not identified by (p), (t), or # are written documentations. Some reports are followed by remarks on the documentation itself, tips on problematic identification, excerpts from committee comments on the report, references, etc. Those reports in the "non-accepted" category will be more abbreviated.

A few general comments on the documentations are in order. Please carefully re-read Barb Wilson's article on documentation (Wilson, 1986). Records cannot be processed without dates and an exact location, with directions from a known landmark which appears on a map. In most of the state, the mileage and directions from the nearest small town are adequate. In urban areas a street address or directions from a major intersection will do. Our ideal is to list the township, range, and section numbers, so that the location can be pinpointed to within a mile. The descriptions of the birds themselves have usually been adequate, and are showing steady improvement, as observers become more practiced. Re-reading the section in Barb's article on how to describe the bird will be helpful if you have any questions. If you have photos to support the written documentation, please send them both together, rather than sending the written part first. This lessens the chance that they will be separated or mixed up. The importance of notes made in the field, at the time of the sighting, or as soon as possible afterwards, cannot be overemphasized. Several reports fell into the non-accepted category simply because they were based in part on memory. Carrying a notebook or pad helps keep a tricky memory honest and eases the deliberations of the committee enormously. Finally, send the documentations directly to the committee chairman if you can. Don't assume someone else will relay everything on. This has caused problems with lost material, photos, etc., and caused needless delay, made it difficult to process records, hard to get replies back to the observer, etc.

Species reports -- accepted records

Pacific Loon, *Gavia pacifica*. A single bird in transitional plumage was on Branched Oak Lake, Lancaster Co. 10-16 November 1986; acc# 058, 060, 062, file# 10-1, 10-2, 10-3, TL, TB, BPa, LP(p), (*NBR* 55:9, 1987). This species was recently split from Arctic Loon, *G. arctica*, and its extralimital distribution is thus imperfectly known. In non-breeding plumage the two species may not be separable except by direct size comparison (DeSchaunsee, 1984; Thede Tobish, pers. comm.) To date, however, the Arctic Loon has been documented

in North America only from Alaska and British Columbia (DeSante and Pyle, 1986).

Red-necked Grebe, *Podiceps grisegena*. One bird was seen in Lincoln, Lancaster Co., 16 June 1985, acc# 001, file# 2-1, WG (NBR 53:77, 1985). Another was seen on Branched Oak Lake, Lancaster Co., 26 October 1986, acc# 061, 063, file# 2-2, 2-3, TB, BPa, LP (NBR 55:9, 1987).

Snowy Egret, *Egretta thula*. A single breeding-plumaged bird was seen near Homer, Dakota Co., 29 April 1986, acc# 037, file# 197-1 WHu (NBR 54:46, 1986).

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, *Nycticorax violaceus*. A single bird in breeding plumage was observed briefly near Albion, Boone Co., 10 April 1986, acc# 019, file# 203-1, WM (NBR 54:47, 1986).

Ibis, *Plegadis* sp., (probably White-faced). A single bird in immature winter plumage was seen near Benedict, York Co., 24 August 1986, acc# 049, file# 187-1, LM (NBR 55:10, 1987). This report raises several points which must be faced by every records committee: 1) should the committee spend time working on reports that are only marginally unusual?, 2) should a report of a regular species be non-accepted because the bird is in a plumage which cannot be separated from another species, even if the rarer species has never been documented to occur in the state?, 3) should the committee accept the report as one of a species pair, if the two species cannot be separated in the field? This report almost undoubtedly involved an immature White-faced Ibis, *P. chihi*, but in this plumage it is probably impossible in the field to separate it from Glossy Ibis, *P. falcinellus*. Even in adult breeding plumage this species pair may not always be separable (Mollhoff, 1985). After considerable debate, which involved more discussion of procedural matters than doubts of the identity of the bird under discussion, the committee decided to vote conservatively and accept the record as "Ibis sp., probably White-faced".

Greater White-fronted Goose, *Anser albifrons*. Three apparently healthy adults spent at least several weeks on a temporary rainwater basin on the Boone-Wheeler county line NW of Albion, 29 May - 24 June 1985, acc# 006, file# 171-1, WM (NBR 53:52, 1985). This appears to be the first summer record for the state (Johnsgard, 1980). No evidence of breeding was noted.

Greater Scaup, *Aythya marila*. A single breeding-plumaged male allowed a leisurely examination near Petersburg, Boone Co., 27-28 March, 1986, acc# 018, file# 148-1, WM (NBR 54:67, 1986).

Oldsquaw, *Clangula hyemalis*. A single male in breeding plumage was seen near North Platte, Lincoln Co., 17 May 1985, acc# 028, file# 154-1, LK (NBR 54:30, 48, 1986).

Black Scoter, *Melanitta nigra*. A single male in breeding plumage was photographed at DeSoto NWR, Washington Co., 25 July 1986, acc# 054, file# 163-1, PS(p), (NBR 55:11, 21, 1987).

White-winged Scoter, *Melanitta fusca*. A flock of ten female/immature birds was seen on Branched Oak Lake, Lancaster Co., 2 November 1986, acc# 059, file# 165-1, KK, PK, (NBR 55:11, 1987).

Mississippi Kite, *Ictinia mississippiensis*. A single adult was photographed in Wilderness Park, near Lincoln, Lancaster Co., 11 May 1986, acc# 041, file# 329-1, KK, PK(p), (NBR 54:48, 1986; 55:47, 1987). A single immature-plumaged bird was seen in Omaha, Douglas Co., 27 September 1986, acc# 051, file# 329-2, TB (NBR 55:12, 1987).

Greater Prairie-Chicken, *Tympanuchus cupido*. Two birds were seen in NE Omaha, Douglas Co., 20 April 1986, acc# 021, file# 305-1, DF, (NBR 54:67-68, 1986).

Sandhill Crane, *Grus canadensis*. A photograph of an albino seen W of Grand Island, Hall Co., 3 April 1986 was filed for record, acc# 036, file# 206-1, TH, HT(p).

Ruddy Turnstone, *Arenaria interpres*. A single bird was seen at the North Platte waste treatment lagoons, Lincoln Co., 18 May 1986, acc# 032, file# 283-1, TL (NBR 54:51, 1986).

Red Knot, *Calidris canutus*. A single bird in breeding plumage was seen at the North Platte waste treatment lagoons, Lincoln Co., 18 May 1986, acc# 034, file# 234-1, TL (NBR 54:51, 1986). Two birds in winter plumage were seen and one was photographed at Lake Babcock, Columbus, Platte Co., 5 September 1986, acc# 065, file# 234-3, BPa, BR(p), (NBR 55:14, 64, 1987).

Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, *Calidris acuminata*. A single juvenile was seen near Octavia, Butler Co., 12 October 1986, acc# 055, 056, file# 238-1, 238-2. JK, SK, BO (NBR 54:70, 1986). The bird was studied at length and the documentaion described the bird's behavior as well as its appearance. The report included the complete original handwritten field notes and sketches made on the scene. The report was referred for expert opinion and was accepted as an adequate description of a juvenile of the species. It is worth noting as well that the age of the bird and the timing of its occurrence here coincided with the pattern established elsewhere on the continent. The distribution of vagrants has been studied enough on a continent-wide basis to show that nearly all such findings are seen to fit into established or emerging patterns. This is the first record for the state.

Red Phalarope, *Phalaropus fulicaria*. A single bird in winter plumage was found at the Willow Creek Recreation Area near Pierce, Pierce Co., 23 September 1985, acc# 005, file# 222-1, EB, MB (NBR 53:72-73, 1985). Another individual in juvenile plumage, with some remnants of natal down still evident, was photographed at Lake Babcock, Columbus, Platte Co., 13 October 1986, acc# 084, file# 222-2, BPa, BR(p) (NBR 55:15, 64, 1987). These are the second and third records for the state; the only previous record was one collected 15 October 1921 in Cherry Co.

California Gull, *Larus californicus*. A single bird was seen at the North Platte waste treatment lagoons, Lincoln Co., 18 May 1986, acc# 031, file# 53-1 RG (NBR 54:30 1986).

Glaucous Gull, *Larus hyperboreus*. A single immature bird in first winter plumage was seen just below the spillway of Gavins Point Dam, Cedar Co., 30 November 1985, acc# 008, file# 42-1, WHu, JP. Another bird, apparently also an immature, was photographed on Lake North, Columbus, Platte Co., 4 April 1986, acc# 035, file# 42-2, HT TH(p) (NBR 54:68, 1986).

Groove-billed Ani, *Crotophaga sulcirostris*. A single bird was seen by many and photographed at Beaver Lake, near Plattsouth, Cass Co., 22 September 1985, acc# 004, file# 384-1, MK, HH(p) (NBR 53:78-79, 1985).

Hummingbird, *Selasphorus* sp. A single immature-plumaged bird in Bellevue, Sarpy Co., 10-17 November 1985, was studied at length, acc# 022, file# 433-1, AD (NBR 53:80, 1985, 54:16, 1986). The lively discussion among committee members also included outside expert opinion, but a consensus could not be reached on assigning the bird to species, based on the description available. Due to the difficulties of separating immature/winter plumaged members of this genus, the committee decided to vote conservatively and accept the record as *Selasphorus* sp. The committee agreed that the claimed identification of Rufous Hummingbird, *S. rufus*, was the most likely identification, in view of the description and known patterns of wandering, but felt that other species could not be completely ruled out. It is, nonetheless, an outstanding record, especially considering the date and the weather at the time.

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, *Tyrannus forficatus*. A single sub-adult was seen by several observers near Maxwell, Lincoln Co., 17 May 1986, acc# 030, 040, file# 443-1, 443-2 TL, WG (NBR 54:30, 55, 1986).

Steller's Jay, *Cyanocitta stelleri*. A single bird was seen near Gering, Scotts Bluff Co., 11 October 1985, acc# 014, file# 478-1, AK (NBR 54:17, 1986). The report also mentioned several other undocumented sightings in the area that winter.

Clark's Nutcracker, *Nucifraga columbiana*. A bird was documented on West Hat Creek, NE of Harrison, Sioux Co., 22 August 1986, acc# 052, file# 491-1, BPr, MP. The same observers saw another one or two birds at Chadron State Park, Dawes Co., 23 August 1986, acc# 053, file# 491-2, BPr, MP. These were the only reports of a major invasion that included sightings of flocks of a dozen or more birds that were received by the committee. The birds were reported in the northern Panhandle and as far southeast as Lincoln Co., from August 1986 through May or June, 1987.

Bewick's Wren, *Thryomanes bewickii*. A single singing individual was noted at the NOU Annual Meeting at Schramm State Park, Sarpy Co., 19 May 1985, acc# 024, file# 719-1, WG (NBR 53:39, 55-56, 50, 1985).

Varied Thrush, *Ixoreus naevius*. A single bird NW of Tryon, McPherson Co. 7 June 1985 was described, acc# 003, file# 763-1, OB (NBR 53:61, 1985). This appears to be the latest spring date for this species (Johnsgard, 1980).

Philadelphia Vireo, *Vireo philadelphicus*. A single bird was reported near Dixon, Dixon Co., 19 May 1986, acc# 046, file# 626-1, ME. This breeding-plumaged bird was adequately described. It may be noted here that in fall immature plumage this species may be very difficult to separate in the field from the more common Warbling Vireo, *V. gilvus*. In the hand they may be separated by the full-length tenth (outermost) primary of the Philadelphia, whereas the tenth primary in the Warbling is a tiny feather. Both may be quite yellowish underneath and exhibit other similar characteristics, however, the Warbling Vireo apparently always is whitish in the center of its breast, while the Philadelphia has a completely yellow breast (Robrson, 1980; Roberts, 1955). Observers should be extremely cautious in identifying this species pair in the fall.

Golden-winged Warbler, *Vermivora chrysoptera*. A single singing male was at Branched Oak Lake, Lancaster Co., 10 May 1986, acc# 045, file# 642-1, PK (NBR 54:59-60, 1986).

Northern Parula, *Parula americana*. A singing male of this species, regular in the eastern part of the state, was seen in Scottsbluff, Scotts Bluff Co., 25 May 1985, acc# 025, file# 648-1, AK (NBR 53:62, 65-66, 1985).

Palm Warbler, *Dendroica palmarum*. A single bird of the western race was found NE of Dixon, Dixon Co., 6 May 1986, acc# 047, file# 672-1, ME (NBR 54:50-51, 1986).

Rose-breasted x Black-headed Grosbeak, *Pheucticus ludovicianus* x *P. melanocephalus*. A report was filed of a hybrid male seen near North Platte, Lincoln Co., 18 May 1986, acc# 033, file# 595 x 596-1, TL (NBR 54:30, 1986).

Cassin's Sparrow, *Aimophila cassinii*. A well-described singing male responded aggressively to a taped call of the species near Lisco, Garden Co., 21 May 1986, acc# 029, file# 578-1, TL (NBR 54:80-81, 1986). Actions of the bird indicated territoriality but definite proof of breeding was not found.

(Gray-headed) Dark-eyed Junco, *Junco hyemalis caniceps*. A single bird was seen at Dominick Lake, SW of Ashby, Grant Co., 4 June 1986, acc# 027, file# 569-1, WM, (NBR 54:47-48, 62, 81, 1986). This appears to be the latest date on record for this sub-species (Johnsgard, 1980).

Smith's Longspur, *Calcarius pictus*. A single breeding-plumaged male was seen at Dam Site 11, NW of Omaha, Douglas Co., 15 April 1986, acc# 044, file# 537-2, BP (NBR 54:62, 1986). It coincided with a flight of other longspurs and a late spring blizzard.

(Gray-crowned) Rosy Finch, *Leucosticte arctoa tephrocotis*. A single male was seen S of Gering, Scotts Bluff Co., 4 March 1985, acc# 016, file# 524-1, AK (NBR 53:66, 1985).

White-winged Crossbill, *Loxia leucoptera*. A flock of about 20 birds was seen in Scottsbluff, Scotts Bluff Co., 10 December 1984, acc# 015, file# 522-1, AK (NBR 53:17, 1985). A flock of 6-10 birds was in Albion, Boone Co., 12-15 November 1984, acc# 020, file# 522-2, WM (NBR 53:17, 1985).

Lesser Goldfinch, *Carduelis psaltria*. A single male was seen repeatedly S of Crawford, Dawes Co., 1 June to 7 July 1986, acc# 050, file# 530-1, JM, (NBR 54:56, 1986). The same observer also reported (without supplying additional documentation) that he had seen what may have been the same bird several times over the past several years. This is about 30 miles E of the only other sighting reported in the state (NBR 52:42, 1984).

Non-accepted records

Chukar, *Alectoris chukar*. A single bird reported SW of Franklin, Franklin Co., 7 June 1986, (NBR 54:49, 1986) was unquestionably identified correctly, but is not accepted due to the likelihood that it was released locally. This species is frequently released for hunting or for training dogs, but has not yet become established in the wild in the state.

King Rail, *Rallus elegans*. A call thought to be of this species was heard in NE Arthur Co., 5 June 1986 (NBR 54:47, 1986). However, the bird was not seen, its call could not be recorded, nor was the complete diagnostic call for the species described. The species has been reported previously from Keith Co., about 40 miles SW of this location (NBR 52:30, 1984).

Red Knot, *Calidris canutus*. A second report of the bird seen at North Platte, Lincoln Co., 18 May 1986 was received but not accepted because of the lack of detail in the description.

Laughing Gull, *Larus atricilla*. The description of a single bird, reportedly with a flock of Franklin's Gulls, *L. pipixcan*, in Lancaster Co., 26 May 1986

(*NBR* 54:52, 1986), did not completely rule out the possibility of it being a Franklin's. The latter may closely resemble *L. atricilla* in some plumages and separation in the field may be very difficult. For further information see Chase (1985) or one of the specialized gull/seabird guides. There have been a number of reports of this species in the state, but only one has been verified (Bray et al, 1986).

Common Black-headed Gull, *Larus ridibundus*. A single winter-plumaged bird was reported from Douglas Co., 18 November 1985, (*NBR* 54:28, 1986), but the committee did not feel that the very similar Bonaparte's Gull, *L. philadelphia*, could be absolutely ruled out. In addition, the report was received secondhand. As a result of procedural questions raised, the committee has decided not to routinely accept reports from someone other than an original observer, primarily to reduce chances of confusion. The committee does, however, retain the option of searching out and evaluating other records, especially older historical reports.

Ivory Gull, *Pagophila eburnea*. An intriguing report concerning this species has been published (*NBR* 54:70, 1986), but was found by the committee, as well as outside expert opinion, to be inconclusive. Objections to the report were in three main areas: 1) the description was not detailed enough to rule out leucistic (feathers lack pigment but other parts are pigmented) or albinistic (neither feathers nor soft parts pigmented), gulls of other species, 2) the early date (12 October) of the sighting (other inland sightings have been December to February), 3) the age of the bird (other inland sightings have been of immatures). These points were raised both by members of the committee and outside experts. For a report of this extremely unlikely species to be accepted, it would have to contain an EXTREMELY detailed description that could eliminate all other white gulls, preferably substantiated by a series of adequate photos, or better yet, a specimen.

Whiskered Screech-Owl, *Otus trichopsis*. A report of this species was too sketchy for the committee to begin actions, further details were requested but not submitted.

Rufous Hummingbird, *Selephorus rufus*. A second report of the hummingbird accepted above as *Selasphorus* sp. was not complete enough to be acceptable.

Pileated Woodpecker, *Dryocophus pileatus*. A report of this species did not contain sufficient data to make it acceptable to the committee.

Common Raven, *Corvus corax*. An old record of this species (*NBR* 54:43 1986) was considered indicative but not absolutely diagnostic (Class IV) because the details were rather sketchy and it was based in part on recollection and not entirely on field notes made at the time of the sighting.

Smith's Longspur, *Calcarius pictus*. A small flock reported in Morrill Co., 2 September 1984 (*NBR* 53:81, 1985) was considered indicative (Class IV) but not accepted because part of the report appeared to be based on memory rather than on field notes made at the time of the sighting.

Audubon's Oriole, *Icterus graduacauda*. A report of this sedentary Mexican species did not have enough detail to convince the committee. The closest known population is in the lower Rio Grande Valley of extreme southern Texas, and the committee is not aware of any instances of vagrancy nearer than Midland and San Antonio, Texas (Texas Ornith. Soc., 1984). Given the extreme plumage variations exhibited by orioles in the Baltimore/Bullock's gene pool in western Nebraska, every effort should be made to salvage unusual orioles. While it is possible that orioles of other species than Northern, *I. galbula*, and Orchard, *I. spurius*, may be found in Nebraska, virtually all of these unusual birds may be safely assigned to the Baltimore/Bullock's complex.

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